

Psalm 139:1-18
January 15, '12

“FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY – THAT’S YOU!”

I’VE NEVER BEEN ONE FOR “OLD SAYINGS” OR “PITHY QUOTES” OR “COMMON CLICHES.”

YOU KNOW THE THINGS I’M TALKING ABOUT – “*THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM,*” “*STUCK BETWEEN A ROCK & A HARD PLACE,*” “*HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR.*”

FOR ONE THING, WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, I DIDN’T UNDERSTAND MOST OF THEM AND, TO BE HONEST, I’M AFRAID I STILL DON’T SO I FIGURE I’M BETTER OFF NOT USING THOSE OLD SAYINGS IF I REALLY DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY MEAN.

KIDS ARE NOTORIOUS FOR HEARING THINGS INCORRECTLY, AREN’T THEY?

THERE’S A TRUE STORY OF A MOTHER WHO HAD TWO YOUNG DAUGHTERS.

ONE DAY SHE NOTICED SOMETHING STRANGE.

THE HOUSE WAS UNUSUALLY QUIET & AS EVERY PARENT KNOWS, A QUIET HOUSE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN IN IT IS NOT A GOOD SIGN, UNLESS THOSE YOUNG CHILDREN ARE TAKING A NAP & THIS MOTHER KNEW THAT HER DAUGHTERS WEREN’T NAPPING.

SHE QUIETLY WALKED FROM ONE ROOM TO THE NEXT, UNABLE TO FIND THEM.

SHE FINALLY HEARD THE SOUND OF WHISPERING, FOLLOWED BY THE FLUSH OF A TOILET.

THEN SHE HEARD IT AGAIN – WHISPER, FLUSH.

A FEW MINUTES LATER – WHISPER, FLUSH.

SHE STOOD OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM & POKED HER HEAD INSIDE WITHOUT HER DAUGHTERS KNOWING SHE WAS THERE.

THEY WERE STANDING OVER THE TOILET & THERE IT WAS AGAIN – WHISPER, FLUSH.

ONE OF THEM WAS HOLDING A DRIPPING BARBIE DOLL BY THE ANKLES AND THE OTHER ONE HAD HER FINGER ON THE HANDLE.

THIS IS WHAT THE MOTHER HEARD: “*I BAPTIZE YOU IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND THE SON & IN THE HOLE YOU GO.*”

FLUSH!

KIDS DON’T ALWAYS HEAR THINGS EXACTLY RIGHT!

BUT SOMETIMES THEY DO HEAR THINGS EXACTLY AS THEY ARE SAID & I DON’T THINK I HAVE TO EXPLAIN WHY THAT CAN BE EQUALLY AS FRIGHTENING TO PARENTS!

EARLY LAST WEEK, EMMA SUE RODE TO PITTSBURGH WITH OUR SON DAVID & THEN A FEW DAYS LATER MY FATHER-IN-LAW & I DROVE THERE TO PICK HER UP AT DEREK & ERIN’S, OUR OTHER SON & HIS WIFE WHO LIVE THERE.

THE FIRST DAY I ARRIVED, WHILE PLAYING WITH OUR 2-YEAR-OLD GRANDSON, DYLAN, HE BECAME EXASPERATED OVER SOMETHING & BLURTED OUT “*MERCY SAKES ALIVE!*” WHICH WAS EVIDENCE THAT HE HAD SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF THE PREVIOUS TWO DAYS WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER!

AND NOT LONG AFTER THAT, WHEN HE PULLED A FAST ONE ON ME, HE FOLLOWED IT UP WITH
“BAZINGA!” THAT TOLD ME EITHER HIS UNCLE DAVID HAD BEEN AROUND OR HE’D SEEN TOO MANY EPISODES OF
“THE BIG BANG THEORY!”

YES, SOMETIMES YOUNG CHILDREN GET THINGS EXACTLY RIGHT!

I THINK MY AVERSION TO LITTLE SAYINGS CAN PROBABLY BE TRACED TO SOMETHING MY MATERNAL
GRANDFATHER USED TO SAY THAT, TO THIS DAY, LEAVES ME BAFFLED.

GLENN (THAT’S WHAT WE CALLED HIM BECAUSE HE WASN’T REALLY MY GRANDFATHER) – GLENN HAD A
HABIT OF SAYING – EVERY TWO MINUTES OR SO, FOR SEEMINGLY NO REASON AT ALL – “GEE FOR SOCKS!”

YOU HEARD ME CORRECTLY.

“GEE FOR SOCKS!”

YOU WANT TO TELL WHAT *YOU* THINK THAT’S SUPPOSED TO MEAN!?

JUST BECAUSE I’M NOT COMFORTABLE USING COMMON CLICHES, THOUGH, DOESN’T MEAN I’M NOT FOND
OF & APPRECIATIVE OF THE MANNER IN WHICH WORDS CAN BE USED MOVINGLY & ELOQUENTLY.

THIS ENTIRE SECTION OF THE 139TH PSALM IS A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF WORDS WHEN
USED IN A MASTERFUL FASHION.

A GREAT SCOTTISH THEOLOGIAN IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THAT THE ONE BIT OF WRITING HE WOULD
WISH TO HAVE WITH HIM ON HIS DEATHBED WAS PSALM 139.

THIS IS REALLY A CREATION PSALM.

IT’S NOT ABOUT THE VAST MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE OR THE WONDROUS WORKINGS OF NATURE ALL
ABOUT US.

THE CREATION OF WHICH THE PSALMIST SPEAKS HERE IS – GET READY FOR IT – YOU!

YOU ARE THE OBJECT OF THE WRITER’S LOFTY THOUGHTS & ELOQUENT WORDS.

THERE IS ONE SPECIFIC PHRASE HERE, THOUGH, THAT I BELIEVE IS CRUCIAL TO WHAT THE PSALMIST IS
TRYING TO CONVEY.

IN VERSE 14, HE SAYS, “*I PRAISE YOU, FOR I AM FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY MADE.*”

I WANT TO STAY THERE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SERMON BECAUSE THIS IS AN ABSOLUTELY
EXTRAORDINARY PHRASE WITH A WHOLE HOST OF POSSIBLE MEANINGS.

THE FIRST THING TO NOTICE ABOUT IT IS THAT IF YOU WERE FOLLOWING OUR READING IN THE PEW
BIBLE, IT WAS CONSIDERABLY DIFFERENT.

THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION READS: “*I PRAISE THEE, FOR THOU ART FEARFUL & WONDERFUL.*”

THAT’S QUITE A BIT DIFFERENT, ISN’T IT?

THE AMAZING THING IS THAT THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION HAS GONE BACK TO THE WAY THE
KING JAMES VERSION TRANSLATED THIS VERSE.

I DON’T RECALL A SINGLE OTHER TIME WHEN THIS HAS BEEN THE CASE.

WHAT THIS POINTS OUT IS THE DIFFICULTY IN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL HEBREW.

LISTEN TO THE WAY THIS PHRASE – *“I AM FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY MADE”* – IS RENDERED IN 5 OTHER TRANSLATIONS.

“I WAS MARVELOUSLY SET APART.”

“...THE WONDERFUL WAY YOU CREATED ME.”

“...BODY & SOUL, I AM MARVELOUSLY MADE.”

“THANK YOU FOR MAKING ME SO WONDERFULLY COMPLEX.”

“YOU MADE ME IN AN AMAZING & WONDERFUL WAY.”

I THINK YOU GET THE POINT & THE POINT IS – YOU’RE PRETTY SPECIAL.

NOW I KNOW THAT SOUNDS TERRIBLY TRITE.

BUT IT’S NOT.

IN FACT, IT’S ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND & ASTOUNDING TRUTHS YOU COULD EVER COME TO COMPREHEND.

IF YOU BELIEVE IT – AS WELL YOU SHOULD – IT CAN TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE AS FEW OTHER THINGS CAN.

YOU ARE *“FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY MADE.”*

ISN’T THAT A STRANGE PAIR OF WORDS, THOUGH – *“FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY?”*

THERE ARE DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES AS TO ITS MEANING BUT I THINK ANY PARENT CAN UNDERSTAND THE TWO OF THEM BEING JOINED TOGETHER.

FOR A MOTHER & FATHER, WHEN A CHILD IS BORN, ALL THE FEARFUL & WONDERFUL POSSIBILITIES STAND BEFORE YOU AS YOU LOOK UPON THAT CHILD.

IS NOT THE SAME TRUE FOR GOD AS HE LOOKS UPON EACH ONE OF US AS HIS CHILDREN?

GOD – AS YOUR HEAVENLY PARENT – LOOKS AT YOU AS A FEARFUL & WONDERFUL DIVINE CREATION.

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS – BUT WHETHER THEY END UP BEING FEARFUL OR WONDERFUL IS REALLY UP TO YOU.

DO YOU REMEMBER HEARING THE LEGEND OF THE WISE MAN WHO LIVED IN A CAVE ON THE SKIRTS OF AN ANCIENT TOWN?

IT WAS SAID THAT THIS MAN HAD THE ANSWER TO EVERY QUESTION ANYONE COULD EVER ASK.

TWO BOYS DECIDED THEY WOULD CHALLENGE HIM & HIS ABILITY TO KNOW EVERYTHING THERE WAS TO KNOW.

THEY CAUGHT A BIRD & ONE OF THE BOYS HAD THE BRIGHT IDEA TO GO TO THE WISE MAN IN THE CAVE & TRICK HIM.

HE SAID, *“I’LL HOLD THE BIRD INSIDE MY HANDS & WE’LL ASK HIM WHAT I’M HOLDING. HE’LL KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION BUT THEN WE’LL ASK IF IT’S DEAD OR ALIVE.*

IF HE SAYS IT’S DEAD, I’LL OPEN MY HANDS & THE BIRD WILL FLY AWAY.

BUT IF HE SAYS IT'S ALIVE, I'LL SQUEEZE MY HANDS TOGETHER & KILL IT."

THEY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE CAVE AND, SURE ENOUGH, THE WISE MAN KNEW THAT IT WAS A BIRD IN THE BOY'S HANDS.

BUT THEN THEY ASKED IF IT WAS DEAD OR ALIVE & THEY LOOKED AT ONE ANOTHER SMUGLY, WAITING FOR HIS ANSWER & WAITING TO TRICK HIM.

THE WISE OLD MAN SIMPLY SMILED AND SAID, *"IT'S IN YOUR HANDS, MY SON. IT'S IN YOUR HANDS."*

ISN'T THAT A WONDERFUL PARABLE FOR LIFE?

YOU ARE THE CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OF THE WONDROUS GOD OF ALL CREATION.

YOU HAVE BEEN MADE WITH FEARFUL & WONDERFUL POSSIBILITIES.

BUT IT'S REALLY UP TO YOU AS TO WHICH IT WILL BE.

MORE THAN 1,600 YEARS AGO, AUGUSTINE SPOKE ABOUT THE MAGNIFICENCE OF HUMAN LIFE WHEN HE SAID, *"PEOPLE TRAVEL TO WONDER AT THE HEIGHT OF MOUNTAINS, AT THE HUGE WAVES OF THE SEA, AT THE LONG COURSES OF RIVERS, AT THE VAST COMPASS OF THE OCEAN, AT THE CIRCULAR MOTION OF THE STARS; AND THEY PASS BY THEMSELVES WITHOUT WONDERING."*

LET'S FACE IT – NOT MANY OF US ARE ENTHRALLED BY OURSELVES, ARE WE?

WE TEND TO THINK *LESS* OF OURSELVES THAN WE REALLY SHOULD.

THAT MAY SURPRISE YOU, BUT I THINK IT'S TRUE.

PETER GOMES, THE LATE PREACHER AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY, HAD A WONDERFUL WAY OF PUTTING THIS.

HE SAID, *"THERE IS GOOD NEWS & THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT THE GOSPEL. THE NEWS IS NOT THAT WE ARE WORSE THAN WE THINK.*

IT IS THAT WE ARE BETTER THAN WE THINK, AND BETTER THAN WE DESERVE TO BE.

WHY? BECAUSE AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE WHOLE ENTERPRISE IS THE INDISPUTABLE FACT THAT WE ARE CREATED, MADE, FORMED, INVENTED, PATENTED IN THE IMAGE OF GOODNESS ITSELF.

PEOPLE MAY TAKE EVERYTHING AWAY FROM YOU, THEY MAY DEPRIVE YOU OF EVERYTHING YOU HAVE & VALUE.

BUT THEY CAN'T TAKE AWAY FROM YOU THE FACT THAT YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD & BEAR THE IMPRESSION OF GOD IN YOUR VERY SOUL.

YOU CANNOT BE DESTROYED & THAT CANNOT BE DENIED."

THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT THE PSALMIST IS TELLING US.

HE'S TELLING US THAT GOD IS WITH US AT THE VERY CORE OF OUR BEING – DEEPER & MORE PROFOUND & MORE FANTASTIC THAN ANYTHING SCIENCE COULD EVER MEASURE OR UNDERSTAND.

THE PSALMIST ASSURES US THAT GOD KNOWS US – EACH & EVERY ONE OF US & THAT WE ARE PRECIOUS & PRICELESS IN GOD'S SIGHT.

THAT WONDROUS PHRASE – "FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY MADE" – DESCRIBES YOU.

ACTUALLY, THE “FEARFULLY” COULD JUST AS EASILY BE TRANSLATED “AWESOMELY” SO WE CAN PERHAPS TAKE THE CONTRAST OUT & LOOK AT IT IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

WE CAN SAY THAT THE PSALMIST IS SIMPLY EMPHASIZING THE FACT THAT YOU ARE VERY SPECIAL – BOTH “AWESOME” AND “WONDERFUL.”

THAT’S REALLY WHO YOU ARE!

YOU ARE AN AWESOME, WONDERFUL & UNIQUE CREATION OF GOD.

THERE’S NO ONE ELSE IN ALL THE UNIVERSE, NO ONE ELSE IN ALL OF HISTORY, WHO IS EXACTLY LIKE YOU!

AGAIN, THAT MAY SEEM TO BE TRITE, BUT PERHAPS IT SEEMS SO TRITE THAT WE DON’T REALLY THINK ABOUT IT OFTEN ENOUGH AND NOT THINKING ABOUT IT OFTEN ENOUGH, WE DON’T RECOGNIZE HOW TRUE IT IS!

THIS IS MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. WEEKEND.

IN FACT, THIS VERY DAY IS THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH.

THIS OUTSTANDING PREACHER, PROPHET & MAN OF GOD HAD SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THIS VERY TOPIC.

HE SAID: “*THERE IS SUCH A THING AS RATIONAL & HEALTHY SELF-INTEREST.*

BEFORE YOU CAN LOVE OTHER SELVES ADEQUATELY, YOU’VE GOT TO LOVE YOUR OWN SELF PROPERLY.

A LOT OF PEOPLE DON’T LOVE THEMSELVES.

AND THEY GO THROUGH LIFE WITH DEEP & EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS.

YOU KNOW WHAT LOVING YOURSELF MEANS?

IT MEANS THAT YOU’VE GOT TO ACCEPT YOURSELF.

SO MANY PEOPLE ARE BUSY TRYING TO BE SOMEBODY ELSE.

GOD GAVE ALL OF US SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT.

AND WE MUST PRAY EVERY DAY, ASKING GOD TO HELP US ACCEPT OURSELVES.

WE MUST DISCOVER WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO.

AND ONCE WE DISCOVER IT, WE SHOULD SET OUT TO DO IT WITH ALL OF THE STRENGTH AND ALL OF THE POWER THAT WE HAVE IN OUR SYSTEMS.

WE SHOULD SET OUT TO DO THAT WORK SO WELL THAT THE LIVING, THE DEAD, OR THE UNBORN COULDN’T DO IT ANY BETTER!”

IT DOESN’T MATTER HOW YOUNG OR HOW OLD YOU ARE.

IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT YOUR PAST HAS BEEN.

IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT OTHERS THINK OF YOU OR WHAT YOU’VE THOUGHT OF YOURSELF BEFORE NOW.

YOU ARE AN AWESOMELY, FEARFULLY, WONDERFULLY, UNIQUELY-MADE CREATION OF ALMIGHTY GOD.

AND TO THAT I CAN ONLY SAY, “GEE FOR SOCKS!” AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church*

Evansville, Indiana